

A photograph of a woman with blonde hair tied in a ponytail, wearing a black wetsuit with red accents, riding an orca. The orca is breaching the water, with its white underside and black back visible. The woman is lying on her back, holding onto the orca's back. The background shows a rocky coastline under a clear sky.

REQUIEM FOR A WHALE RIDER

E. MICHAEL JONES

REQUIEM FOR A WHALE RIDER
By E. Michael Jones

Fidelity Press
206 Marquette Avenue
South Bend, Indiana 46617

Copyright 2011

To Thomas J. Herron

PREFACE

SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau died from drowning on Wednesday, February 24, 2010 at SeaWorld Florida's Shamu Stadium after the 12,000 pound bull killer whale she was working with (the largest in captivity) grabbed her from the feeding platform and dragged her underwater.

Missing from the debate was any mention of the SeaWorld employees who risked their lives for the entertainment of a nation whose tastes had been jaded by a steady diet of special effects movies. The only thing that anyone could think to say about Brancheau was that she "died doing what she loved." After saying exactly that, Diane Gross, Brancheau's sister, assured one of the many reporters who called her for comment that "Dawn wouldn't want anything done to the whale now blamed in her death."

But the reason women are willing to risk their lives by riding whales goes deeper. Riding whales in Florida, like riding bulls in Minoan Crete, is a religious ritual. If we take *Free Willy* and the New Zealand/Maori film *Whale Rider* as expressions of the same religion James Cameron draws on in *Avatar*, whale riding can be seen as the ultimate sign of election, if for no other reason that whales are the ultimate animals in terms of size. The iconic expression of this religion, and the historic icon which joins Minoan bull riders and Dawn Brancheau's whale riding at SeaWorld, is the myth of the Abduction of Europa.

If nature worship is a religion, then Jean-Jacques Rousseau is its theologian. Rousseau's genius conflated the two senses of the word nature into something that was congenial to both Capitalists and Treehuggers, the materialist twins in the dialectic which has dominated this discussion: Sexual guilt, festering in the soul of the Christian who refuses to repent, invariably finds solace in the innocence of animals. The anti-Christian burdened by the guilt of a life devoted to appetite is drawn ever closer to animals which possess the innocence he craves. Drawn to animals, he feels compelled to seek their approval. And how do they confer approval? By letting the bearer of that troubled soul ride them. As the image of Europa on the Bull makes clear, riding an animal is a vaguely sexual act which bespeaks approval, but also union, a fusion of two beings, which confers on the troubled rider the innocence of the animal being ridden. Finding only momentary relief from

guilt, the Christian burdened with an uneasy conscience forces himself more and more intrusively on the animals whose innocence and approval he craves, until finally one of those unpredictable mechanisms goes off in the animal's mind and the animal kills the human who sought his approval.

E. Michael Jones

November, 2011

The royal virgin even dares to sit on the bull's back, not realizing whom she presses on, while the god, first from dry land and then from the shoreline, gradually slips his deceitful hooves into the waves. Then he goes further out and carries his prize over the mid-surface of the sea. She is terrified and looks back at the abandoned shore she has been stolen from and her right hand grips a horn, the other his back, her clothes fluttering, winding, behind her in the breeze.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*

Book II: 844-875

. . . all their enchanted eyes [were] intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semicircular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the harpooneers aloft shook on their bull-like necks. Through the breach, they heard the waters pour, as mountain torrents down a flume.

Herman Melville

Moby Dick

"That whale's more human than you are."

Free Willy 3

"I can smell death all over my fingers."

Timothy Treadwell

Grizzly Man

SeaWorld trainer Dawn Brancheau died from drowning on Wednesday, February 24, 2010 at SeaWorld Florida's Shamu Stadium after the 12,000 pound bull killer whale she was working with (the largest in captivity) grabbed her from the feeding platform and dragged her underwater. Initial eyewitness accounts gave conflicting reports of the incident. One woman claimed that the whale grabbed Brancheau around the waist and shook her, knocking off her shoes, before dragging her into the water. According to another account, the one that became the most accepted, Dawn's long ponytail brushed against the whale's nose setting off some instinctive reaction in the whale, which led to her death.

Once Brancheau found herself in the whale's mouth, there was little SeaWorld personnel could do to save her. The emergency sirens went off; the small number of guests who had paid extra to watch Dawn interact with the whale up close were hustled out of Shamu Stadium, but the other trainers could do nothing to save Dawn's life. The whale continued to swim around the pool with Dawn in his mouth. That the trainers' efforts to stop him were futile should come as no surprise considering the speed and power of killer whales, which can travel over a hundred miles per day in the wild. Eventually, the trainers coaxed the whale into a smaller pool fitted with a lift at the bottom, which allowed them to winch the whale out of the water. It was only after the SeaWorld employees had hoisted the whale out of the water that they could extricate Brancheau's by now lifeless body from its jaws.

Before long, one of the guests at the lunch with the whales crowd produced a video of Brancheau's last minutes with the whale. The video captures her in her killer whale colored wet suit, standing at poolside feeding the whale, scratching its fins and jaw, and dousing him with buckets of water. The film which got released on the internet had been edited so it contains a jump cut to a frame of Dawn now on the other side of the pool lying on her stomach in one of the shallow trays that juts out into the pool looking over her back, smiling at the now aroused and agitated whale. No footage of the events during the moments after that frame has been released.

Every account of what happened after that moment got absorbed into the polemics surrounding Brancheau's death. Before long, both the head trainer and the management at SeaWorld began giving accounts of what happened that subtly indicated that Brancheau was in some sense responsible for her own death. SeaWorld's corporate trainer Chuck Tompkins said that, "the whale was lying in front of Brancheau when her braid swung in front of him and he apparently grabbed onto it. We like to think we know 99.9 percent of the time what an animal is doing," he told The Associated Press on Thursday. "But this is one of those times we just don't know." When a reporter for WFTV asked Tompkins if the whale was bored, Tompkin became defensive.

"That is not accurate at all." Tompkins replied. "We spend our entire day intellectually stimulating these animals. There's learning sessions and play times and relationship sessions and there's just so many things we do."

A former SeaWorld contractor disagreed. Tilikum had been captured as a young whale in the ocean off the coast of Iceland and had not adapted to

captivity. He was known to be aggressive." He doesn't get as much social interaction as the other whales and he doesn't get any in-water training interaction," he said.

Sea World's reaction was solemn at the outset, even if unintentionally comic as when they announced that "From now on, VIP visitors will no longer be invited to pet killer whales." If SeaWorld really wanted to redeem itself in the nation's eyes, why didn't they invite, say, Dick Cheney and/or Rahm Emanuel down for the Dawn Brancheau memorial service and fit them up with black and white wet suits and two buckets of fish?

Instead, at a Thursday afternoon press conference, SeaWorld president Dan Brown read a statement from Dawn Brancheau's family.

"Being a trainer was a life-long dream that she achieved. She loved her job; she loved her animals. For her husband, family and friends, Dawn was so much more. She was a compassionate, loving person who lived life to the fullest. Those who knew and loved her have suffered a tremendous loss, one so unexpectedly that it was extremely difficult to even process or comprehend at the time."

But the not so subtle message which began to emerge from the corporate fraternity at SeaWorld is that Dawn Brancheau was to blame for her own death. She violated protocols. By placing the blame on Dawn, SeaWorld hoped to skirt a number of issues that had all been waiting in the wings waiting for this accident to happen. By this point in the story, which is to say, before the sun went down on the day of her death, the sides in battle were clearly if crudely drawn. The crucial issues in the debate revolved around a moral scenario derived from *Free Willy*. Animal rights activists focused on the whales, claiming that they should not be kept in captivity at all, much less further exploited by having them perform. Celebrities like Matt Damon and the son of oceanographer Jean-Jacques Cousteau began weighing in on the side of the whales. Bob Barker, spokesman for PETA, said Tilly should be returned to his native habitat, or placed in a "coastal refuge," where he would be safe from predators. SeaWorld took the side of the whales as well, claiming that most of them (not including, of course, the one that had killed Dawn) had been born and bred in captivity and simply could not survive in the wild. Releasing the whales was tantamount to a death sentence. And there the debate stuck, like a phonograph needle in the groove of a scratched record.

Missing from the debate was any mention of the SeaWorld employees

who risked their lives for the entertainment of a nation whose tastes had been jaded by a steady diet of special effects movies. The only thing that anyone could think to say about Brancheau was that she "died doing what she loved." After saying exactly that, Diane Gross, Brancheau's sister, who lives in Schererville, Indiana, assured one of the many reporters who called her for comment that "Dawn wouldn't want anything done to the whale now blamed in her death."

There is a certain irony in all this, considering Dawn Brancheau's background. Dawn grew up in northern Indiana as one of six children from a Italian Catholic family. Brancheau was student body president at Andrean High School in Merrillville, Indiana, a bedroom community for ethnically cleansed Catholics from Chicago's South Side. She is remembered as "a huge animal lover" and the "face of SeaWorld," the corporation that made millions from her performances with killer whales like Tilly, but her father, the late Charles Lo Verde, was a union man; he was, in fact, president of Laborer's Local Union 1092, which represents Chicago's water and sewer workers. Her brother is president of the same union local today. Presumably, Dawn's father and brother fought for safe working conditions for Chicago's water and sewer workers when they had to descend into the sewers of Chicago. If similar provisions were made for the safety of the employees of SeaWorld who had descend into the killer whale tanks, no one was talking about them. Celebrities were talking about the conditions of captivity for the whales at SeaWorld, but no one was talking about working conditions for the employees there. If anything, the Killer Whale corporate establishment was talking as if Dawn Brancheau had no one to blame but herself. All subsequent debate focused exclusively on the whale and came down to a question of who was the more ardent defender of Tilly's welfare: 1) the animal rights crowd, which wanted Tilly released or 2) the SeaWorld Corporate interests who claimed that Tilly was well cared for and couldn't survive in the wild anyway. The SeaWorld website went out of its way to express concern for the whale that killed Brancheau.

"Many people are asking about the future care of Tilikum, the whale involved in the incident," a SeaWorld blog post said. "We have every intention of continuing to interact with this animal, though the procedures for working with him will change." The news report went on to say that, "Chuck Tompkins, who is in charge of training at all SeaWorld parks, said Thursday that Tilikum will not be isolated from [the Seaword] Orlando location's seven

other whales. He fathered some of them and will continue to mate with others."

Once again the story line of *Free Willy* got invoked by the very people who are the villains in the *Free Willy* movies, namely, the capitalists who own the whales and exploit them for profit. According to SeaWorld's version of the story, the Dawn/Tilly story is all about family. The treehuggers (or in this instance, the whalehuggers) wanted to break up Tilly's family by sending him off to a "coastal refuge," where he didn't know anyone. Images of Tilly pining away for all of the children he sired at SeaWorld leapt immediately to mind.

"We want him to continue to be part of that social group," Tompkins continued. According to the news report, "Trainers will review safety procedures and change them as needed, but Tompkins said he doesn't expect much about the killer whale shows to change."

Tompkins was, indeed, prophetic. After suspending the killer whale shows in the wake of Brancheau's death, SeaWorld resumed them two days later, after a sentimental video presentation on Dawn's life as an animal trainer who "died doing what she loved." The fact that SeaWorld seems more concerned about the whale than about the women who feed the whales (or end up as whale food) is hardly surprising. Tilly is worth millions. Woman trainers are expendable. When one intrepid reporter asked how much Dawn had been paid, SeaWorld refused to discuss her salary. One representative of the industry said that "the positions for trainers who are allowed in the water with the whales are highly-coveted and strictly supervised." In terms of salary, that means that Dawn could have been paid anywhere from \$40,000 to \$250,000 to risk her life for the entertainment of the masses. The 1993 film *Free Willy* puts a human face on the despicable capitalists who run places like SeaWorld, but it totally ignored the risks which the trainers ran in dealing with the whales. In fact, *Free Willy*, if anything, promoted child labor and working conditions even less safe than those at SeaWorld—as when, for example, they portray the 10-year-old hero of the film dangling his legs in the killer whale tank. No matter what it did for whales, *Free Willy* did nothing to bring about safer working conditions for the people who worked with the whales. The premise of the movies—which is to say, "that whale is more human than you are," which is to say, the killer whale is a benign ultimately spiritual creature—virtually guaranteed that anyone who accepted this premise was going to get hurt. Dawn Brancheau, who referred to the whales

as her "children," accepted this premise without reserve, and it was that lack of reservation that led to her death.

The press accounts called Brancheau's death a "tragic accident," but Tilikum had already killed two other people. Tilly was one of three killer whales blamed for killing a trainer who lost her balance and fell in the pool with them in 1991 at Sealand of the Pacific in Victoria, British Columbia. Sealand got closed down, but Tilly got rewarded by being given a promotion and sent to SeaWorld, where he was involved in the death of a man who climbed into his tank to swim with the whales in 1999. Dead men, they say, tell no tales, so it's impossible to know if this man had ever watched *Free Willy*. Even if it's impossible to ascertain, it seems unlikely that anyone who would attempt a stunt like this had never seen the movie. In each instance, the industry spokesmen were quick in their defense of the whale, a creature which is their biggest asset as well as their meal ticket, if you'll pardon the expression. Billy Hurley, chief animal officer at the Georgia Aquarium said that working with killer whales is like driving racecars or piloting jets. There are risks involved, and Brancheau "knew the risks." Of course, there are risks involved in getting out of bed in the morning too, but, as Hurley puts it, "In the case of a killer whale, if they want your attention or if they're frustrated by something or if they're confused by something, there's only a few ways of handling that. If you're right near pool's edge and they decide they want a closer interaction during this, certainly they can grab you," and "At 12,000 pounds there's not a lot of resisting you're going to do."

So was Dawn Brancheau's death a tragic accident, or was it an accident waiting to happen? Was Dawn at fault? Was it her ponytail? The former contractor, who spent hours with the whales, said long hair was identified as an issue in another deadly attack and says Dawn's ponytail might have triggered the killer whale's hunting instinct, or he could have thought it was a toy.

Or, as the quote about "the killer whale's hunting instinct" indicates, was her death the result of a killer whale acting like a killer whale? When all is said and done, killer whales are wild animals, which is to say, creatures which are not rational, which is to say, creatures who function according to instincts as manifested by strict stimulus/response mechanisms. The trainers at Sea World try to engineer these stimulus/response mechanisms by reinforcing "good" behavior (i.e., what the trainers want the whales to do) and ignoring "bad" behavior, but the instincts which control the mechanisms

the trainers manipulate are always there beneath the surface of learned behavior waiting to go off at moments that no one can predict.

It is usually unfamiliar actions which trigger the reaction in the wild animal. Florida, which is the home of O. J. Simpson and notorious for all sorts of deregulation, has more lions and tigers in residential dwellings than any place else on earth. One tiger owner was in the habit of having neighborhood children come into his home to be photographed with his tiger. Everything went fine until one day one little girl dropped something when she was waiting to have her picture taken. Bending over to pick up what she had dropped, the little girl exposed the back of her naked neck to the tiger, who instantly reacted to this stimulus by doing what God has programmed tigers to do. He bit the girl on the neck severing her spine and killing her instantly. Tea pickers in India know this. That is why they wear masks on the back of their heads while picking tea.

The seal is a staple of the killer whale's diet. Unlike sharks, which also eat seals, the killer whale can travel on land, as far as 10 yards, to catch seals sunning themselves on the beach. One of the videos linked to the Dawn Branshau story shows two killer whales doing something akin to walking onto the beach to kill a seal. The video shows two whales as they heave themselves up on to a ledge and lunge at the birds at the side of their pool. This is also precisely the position in which trainers like Dawn inevitably find themselves, even if they follow protocols and don't swim with the killer whales. Whether they get in the tank with whales like Tilikum or not, the trainers have to shovel 300 pounds of fish into the mouths of their charges every day. They become, as a result, associated with food in a situation which killer whales have been programmed to go after seals. Dawn's actions on that unfortunate Wednesday in February set off that behavior.

The Internet is full of videos showing the dangerous nature of what trainers at Sea World are involved in. In addition to the video showing Tilly killing his trainer in British Columbia, another shows how in 2006 one male SeaWorld employee was nearly drowned by killer whales running (or swimming) amok. This particular trainer was lucky enough to escape from this encounter with a broken foot; the foot was broken, of course, because it ended up in a killer whale's mouth.

So why did Dawn put herself in harm's way. The short answer to that question is that the culture—and by this we mean media, school and family—had persuaded her that swimming in 50 degree water with a 12,000 pound

killer whale was "a dream job." Dawn was the model high school student. She was both student body president and homecoming queen, which is to say, a sex object upon whom the culture had superimposed the simulacrum of a leader. She was everything a girl who graduated from high school in 1987 should aspire to be. One of her coaches described her as Andrean High School's "golden girl":

"Dawn was a varsity cheerleader, a member of the golf team that I coached when we won the first sectional, student council president, homecoming queen, and if that wasn't enough, she did everything possible for the school. She was at every sporting event."

DAWN'S FAMILY

Dawn's family, in spite of their Catholic faith and in spite of her father's involvement with unions in Chicago, did nothing to give a Catholic reading of the unreasonable demands which the dominant culture places on young women or the dangers involved in her job. If anything, they reinforced the very commands they should have questioned. Marion Lo Verde, Dawn's mother claimed that, "When [Dawn] was 11 years old, we took the family to SeaWorld and she said, 'I wanna be a Shamu trainer.'"

Diane Gross, Dawn's sister, only echoed her mother's feelings in a more forceful way. Dawn, according to her younger sister, was a success in life because she had a career. No, according to her sister, Dawn had "a dream job." "We as a family feel that she had one of the most awesome jobs in the world and we loved watching her do it," Gross said. "How many people in this world can say 'I ride Shamu for a living'?" Gross said. Gross went on to say that her sister Dawn "loved the whales like her children, she loved all of them." After saying once again that her sister "died doing what she loved," Gross concluded that, "we were just all happy for her that she was able to pursue her career and succeed and be, to me, the top of her field."

"Brancheau," according to the same report, "graduated from the University of South Carolina with degrees in psychology and animal behavior and wasted no time landing a job at SeaWorld."

Dawn was avid to do everything to fulfill the culture's expectations of what a girl born in 1970, at the dawn of the feminist decade, should be. That meant adopting the culture's attitude toward sex in general and birth control in particular. Dawn was one of six children, but she decided not to have any children of her own. Dawn's mother mentioned in one of her interviews that "her daughter had two dogs she cherished, but no children." A friend of

Dawn's brother, the union boss, said that, "Brancheau was so devoted to killer whales, she decided not to have children of her own." Both her mother and her sister claimed that the whales were Dawn's children. "She loved the whales like her children, she loved all of them," said Gross. Friends who knew her said the same thing. "She was married, but didn't have any kids. Loved ones say she came to think of the whales she worked with every day as her own children."

The death of Dawn Brancheau served as a summation of what women who internalize the culture's notion of the good can expect out of life: wage slavery, sterility, and death, on the one hand, but lots of praise for doing noble work on the other. To use the cliché that the culture always brings out when it needs to justify one person's death to satisfy another person's need for entertainment, young women like Dawn get to die doing what they loved.

Everyone agreed that working at Sea World was a "dream job," but that raises another point: Why is jumping into freezing water with dangerous wild animals something girls should consider a "dream job"? Well, part of the answer to that question comes from the fact that is the girls who swim with the whales have been subjected to conditioning at least as intensive as what the whales at SeaWorld have to undergo. In the case of the girls, the conditioning to do things unnatural is known as high school and college, and unlike killer whales, which get paid 300 pounds a day in fish, the girls have to go into debt to pay for this modification of their behavior. Shortly before Dawn died, Yahoo.com ran the story of a woman doctor who borrowed \$250,000 to pay for her education. Because of a series of financial missteps and the inexorable nature of compound interest, that same doctor now, which is to say, 10 years after graduation from medical school, owes the usurers \$550,000.

So the first answer to the question of why Dawn jumped into a tank of freezing water to be eaten by a 12,000 pound wild animal is capitalism, if by capitalism we mean the system of government which is created to serve the interests of the capitalists. Throughout the course of the 20th century, that system of government created (as in the case of the public school system) or allowed to be created (as in the propaganda ministry known as television, Hollywood, and "the media") systems of social engineering which were increasingly draconian, intrusive, and deadly—abortion being the deadliest of all. The fact that Dawn grew up in northern Indiana rather than Chicago, where her father was the head of Local 1092, is the result of the social

engineering of housing that took place during the '50s and '60s (described in my book [*The Slaughter of Cities: Urban Renewal as Ethnic Cleansing*](#)). Dawn's neutering of herself in the interest of her career is the result of the sexual engineering that got practiced on Catholics of her generation, (described in detail in [*Libido Dominandi: Sexual Liberation and Political Control*](#)).

The cultural operating system which enabled the orchestration of both of these social engineering campaigns is known as Capitalism. Capitalism wanted labor mobility during and after World War II, and that necessitated the dismantling of segregation in the South and the destruction of Catholic ethnic neighborhoods in places like Chicago, where Dawn should have grown up. After doing its best to destroy the ethnic neighborhood, Capitalism then launched its assault on the family, beginning with the birth control campaign of the '60s, which included the decriminalization of abortion in 1973 and the promotion of feminism, as a way of doubling the work force and driving down wages. Equal pay for equal work was the slogan that sounded the death knell for Catholic concepts like the family wage. Equal opportunity for women was another word for driving women out of the home, where they could bear and nurture children, and into the work force where they could go into debt and get eaten by whales. SeaWorld, as the symbol of predatory capitalism, brought about the reversal of the Cronos myth. Instead of devouring her "children," Dawn, the hapless, self-neutering feminist, got devoured by their animal surrogates.

The icon of the whale-riding woman came into cultural focus during the high noon of sexual revolution. In 1972, one year before *Roe v. Wade*, the owners of an unnamed theme park persuaded Annette Eckis Godsey to don a bikini and then slip into a tank to ride a killer whale as part of a publicity stunt promoting the '70s version of SeaWorld. Always interested in sexual titillation or the breakdown of customs and mores, and eager to portray the wife and mother as forms of oppression, the media turned out in force with all its cameras running as Annette rode off on the back of a killer whale. The cameras were also running when the killer whale turned on the secretary and tried to eat her. Go to YouTube and check out the action yourself. As Annette slips off the back of the whale into a churning maelstrom whipped into deadly vortex by the frenzied killer whale, a lone man in scuba gear tries to distract the beast from biting off Annette's legs, as trainers on the side of the tank try to extend a pole to pull Annette out of the tank. Each attempt is

rebuffed by the whale, which simultaneously pushes the pole away tries to drown the by now screaming secretary. Finally, the scuba diver in the pool and the attendants on the pool's side succeed in dragging Annette out of the water, but, as the video shows graphically, with one leg still in the whale's toothy mouth. After collapsing in shock after being rescued, Annette needed 200 stitches to repair the damage to her lower body. Less than 24 hours after Dawn Brancheau died in the jaws of another whale, Annette appeared on the Larry King show to ruminate on her own terrifying experiences. When King asked her to speculate on what set the whale off, she said that, "I had heard later that no one had ridden the whale without a wetsuit before." Another possible reason, "No woman had ever ridden this whale before." A more interesting question, but one which Larry King did not ask, is why Annette, who had had no training whatsoever in dealing with whales, agreed to get involved in this hare-brained stunt in the first place.

The answer to that question is Capitalism, or to give its traditional formulation, usury. The Church long ago realized that in any transaction, but especially in transactions between employers and employees, the stronger party will always be tempted to exploit the need of the weaker party. The situation which first came to the Church's attention was the lending of money. Preachers like St. John Capistran, St. Bernardino of Siena, and St. Antonino of Florence heard the cries of the poor in northern Italy, where a worker in one of the early capitalist textile industries who found himself out of luck or unemployed was forced out of need to borrow money from a Jew or a Lombard at usurious (which is to say, on the average, 43 1/3 percent per annum) rates of interest. There was no fundamental difference between this kind of usury and, say, the usury which forced a starving man to pay exorbitant fees for bread or a sick man to pay exorbitant fees for medicine, or the usury which forced a man who needed to support his family to work for less than a just wage. According to Capitalism, both ancient and modern, there was no such thing as a just wage or a just price. This meant that the powerful were free to coerce the weak in any and all financial transactions. The price or the wage was what two people agreed on, no matter how much duress was allowed to coerce the will of the weaker party. The Catholic Church that Dawn and her union president father belonged to was unanimous in condemning such behavior, and, following Aristotle, the Church Fathers and the Scholastics invariably compared the coerced party in these economic transactions to a captain who throws cargo overboard to save himself from

drowning. The image from Aristotle seemed uncannily appropriate to employees at SeaWorld. It was precisely this form of mixed will and coercion that characterized the situation of Dawn Brancheau and *a fortiori* Annette Eckis Godsey, the hapless secretary who got coerced into risking her life for a cheap publicity stunt. Secretaries, as any capitalist knows, are a dime a dozen, and if Annette had refused the honor of riding on the whale, well, there were literally hundreds of young women who were willing to take her place. Feminism and capitalism collaborate in this instance (and in every other instance) to constitute a seamless garment of work-place coercion and economic exploitation.

But the reason women are willing to risk their lives by riding whales goes deeper than that. Riding whales in Florida, like riding bulls in Minoan Crete, is a religious ritual. Dawn Brancheau went to a Catholic high school and was buried out of a Catholic church in Chicago but when she pulled on her black and white wet suit and slipped into the tank in Shamu Stadium in Orlando she became a priestess in a religion which has a wide following in the post-Christian west, the religion of oneness with nature. *Avatar* is a recent homage to this religion. Jake Sully, the crippled American Marine, has to learn how to ride animals before he can be accepted by the Na'abo, otherwise known as "the people," who are Director James Cameron's latest "avatar" of the Noble Savage. What Jake learns in Cameron's film is more than just how to ride an ugly six-legged horse. If that's what *Avatar* were about, it would be no different than Euripede's play *Hippolytus* or *My Friend Flicka*. No, in keeping with the tenets of Hollywood's nature religion, Jake has to become one with the horse, something he accomplishes by plugging the end of his pigtail into an equally grotesque appliance protruding from the side of the horse. The same thing is true when Jake learns to ride the Planet Pandora version of the pterodactyl. Jake can only be accepted by "the people," if he is first accepted by--i.e., becomes one with; i.e., learns how to ride--these two hypothetical beasts.

Whale riding is the same idea taken to a higher level. If we take *Free Willy* and the New Zealand/Maori film *Whale Rider* as two expressions of the same religion James Cameron is drawing on in *Avatar*, whale riding can be seen as the ultimate sign of election, if for no other reason that whales, on this planet at least, are the ultimate animals in terms of size. In *Free Willy*, an orphan in trouble with the law who can't get along with anyone, not even the foster family that adopts him, is recognized as having special gifts by the

killer whale, which in effect straightens out the kid's life for him. The confirmation of this boy's election comes in *Free Willy 2*, when he actually gets to ride the killer whale.

Free Willy is profamily and anti-Capitalist, but it shares the same religious underpinning as *Whale Rider*, which is feminist morality play set among the Maori of New Zealand. The main character in this movie is a girl whose mother and twin brother die when she is born. The grandfather, who had hoped that her still-born brother could have become the political messiah of the Maori people, excludes his daughter from the traditional training, reserved to males, that is supposed to toughen the Maori people, who are now growing fat and lazy as wards of the state. Needless to say, the grandfather's plans for ethnic redemption go hopelessly awry, based as they are on gender discrimination. Just when it seems that the Maori people are doomed to inanition followed by extinction, a pod of whales washes up on the beach. These are right whales, which are bigger and uglier than killer whales. The Maori struggle valiantly to drag the whales back into the ocean, but since they are cursed by the sin of gender discrimination, all their efforts fail. It is precisely at this moment that the film's girl heroine climbs onto the back of the beached whale the Maori have abandoned. The girl squints and prays to the Maori equivalent of the great Manitou, and because she has the anointing that comes from being at one with nature, the unfortunate whale suddenly regains feeling in his massive tail and the sets off into the ocean with the girl riding on his back. Because the girl can ride the whale she is recognized as the savior of the Maori people, and the film ends with her and grandpa, now purged of whatever sin of sexual discrimination he may have committed, being paddled out to sea by a crew of reinvigorated Maoris of both sexes. Whale riding is the sign of election for those who believe in the religion of nature and the equality of the sexes which goes with it.

The iconic expression of this religion, and the historic icon which joins Minoan bull riders and Dawn Brancheau's whale riding at SeaWorld is the myth of the Abduction of Europa. The classic expression of the myth comes from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Zeus has taken a fancy to Europa the daughter of King Agenos of Tyre. In order to seduce Europa, Zeus turns himself into a white bull, because like Dawn Brancheau and many other women, Europa was fond of animals and found them, unlike men, "unthreatening." Like Dawn, who got paid to feed a bull killer whale, Europa decides that the best way to approach the bull is to feed him. After feeding the bull, all of Europa's

fears disappear and are replaced by something which seems like sexual desire:

"But though he seemed so gentle she was afraid at first to touch him. Soon she drew close and held flowers out to his glistening mouth. The lover was joyful and while he waited for his hoped-for pleasure he kissed her hands. He could scarcely separate then from now. At one moment he frolics and runs riot in the grass, at another he lies down, white as snow on the yellow sands. When her fear has gradually lessened he offers his chest now for virgin hands to pat and now his horns to twine with fresh wreaths of flowers."

Feeling safe with the bull, Europa climbs on his back, and at this point the bull plunges into the sea, like Tilikum, and starts swimming toward Crete: "The royal virgin even dares to sit on the bull's back, not realizing whom she presses on, while the god, first from dry land and then from the shoreline, gradually slips his deceitful hooves into the waves. Then he goes further out and carries his prize over the mid-surface of the sea. She is terrified and looks back at the abandoned shore she has been stolen from and her right hand grips a horn, the other his back, her clothes fluttering, winding, behind her in the breeze (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book II: 844-875)."

The story of Europa and the bull was one of the earliest Mediterranean myths and graphic representations could be found on "vases, mosaic, metopes, Cretan coins, and wall paintings," including several frescoes at Pompeii, it is mentioned in writings going back to Homer, Hesiod, Aeschylus, and Callimachus.^[1] Herodotus saw the Europa myth as "an image of the ancient enmity between Europe and Asia: Phoenician merchant sailors kidnapped Io, the daughter of King Inachos of Argos; in return, the Greeks sailed to Tyre, abducted Europa, daughter of the king of Phoenicia, and carried her away to Crete."

The image, however, was not part of the canon of classical Greek thought, probably because the Greeks held the conquered "thalassocracy [seapower] of Minos" in contempt. Crete emerged in the second millennium BC "to become the greatest civilization of the Mediterranean world between those of Egypt and Athens before it sank into obscurity in the face of Grecian glory and Roman grandeur" (p. 3), but there is no literature or philosophy or history in the languages of Crete. All of the extant documents in Linear A and Linear B are business memos, inventory lists, the dreary accounts of the Capitalism of antiquity, which produced increasingly shoddy goods to keep up with demand. Arnold Toynbee says of Minoan artifacts that "it looks

almost as if a deterioration in the quality of craftsmanship was the price which had to be paid for an expansion of output."^[2] Greeks held Cretans in contempt, because, as St. Paul pointed out in his epistle to Titus (1:12), they were "liars, evil beasts [and] lazy gluttons." There were other reasons to hold Cretans in contempt: in addition to their other vices, they were failed capitalists. By the beginning of the flowering of Greek Culture in the fifth century BC, Crete had become economically irrelevant to the ancient world. Beyond that "the Minoan matrilineal culture based on a monotheistic religion of the Great Mother. . . was alien to the male-dominated Pantheon of the Greeks."^[3] Most damaging of all, the image of Europa had fixed the Cretans in the Greek mind as passive, feminine observers. Cretans were not actors; they were acted upon by superior forces like Zeus, the king of the Greek gods. Like Europa, Minoan culture was born off on the back of a hardier race and integrated, like a captured bride, into a superior, which is to say, more virile culture.

The only surviving artifact of Minoan culture in Greek thought was the *Hippolytus* of Euripides, which is set in the Peloponnesian city of Treozon. According to Ziolkowski, "Popular indifference toward" Minoan culture "was probably a factor contributing to the loss of dramas on Minoan subjects attributed to Aeschylus (on Europa), Sophocles (on Daedalus and Minus) and Euripides (on Pasiphae and the Minotaur)." Plato bequeathed to the West the image of horse and rider as a symbol of passion under the control of reason, but Euripides qualified the image by indicating the rider wasn't all that secure in the saddle. Even granting its qualification of Plato's image and its Minoan origins, the story of *Hippolytus* is the opposite of the story of Europa. Hippolytus (whose name indicates a man who unties horses or is undone by them) not only rides his horse, he brags about his ability to control it and by extension the bestial lower nature it represents. This bragging about self-control as well as his refusal to have sex with his stepmother Phaedra offends Venus, the goddess of love, who sends a sea monster to spook Hippolytus's horse while he is riding on the beach. In both the *Hippolytus* and the Europa myth, the sea is the realm of chaos, which to say, desire and appetite outside the realm of rational control. Hippolytus ends up being trampled to death by the same horses he bragged about controlling. Like most heroes in Greek tragedies, Hippolytus is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Yet in spite of everything, he dies a noble death, attempting up until the very end to keep animal passion under rational control. Europa, by contrast, survives her

voyage over the realm of chaos, but she does not ride the bull; she is a passive passenger on its back, riding sidesaddle, so to speak, like a woman. Tatius makes this clear when, commenting on ancient representations of Europa, he writes that "The girl sits on the bull, not like a man on a horse, but on the side, on the right side her two feet, holding the horn with her left hand, with her other the tail."[\[4\]](#)

Largely ignored by the golden age of Greece, Europa came into her own as a Roman icon. Just about all of the extant graphic representations of Europa can be found in Etruscan and Roman art. Ziolkowski sees this popularity as "consistent with the rise, notably among Roman soldiers and traders beginning in the late first century of the mystery cult of Mithras. Depictions of the 'taurectomy'—Mithras slaying a bull in a cave, which presumably had soteriological meaning—provided the focal point in the hundreds of excavated temples scattered through the later empire."[\[5\]](#)

In the ancient world, Europa became the symbol of a feminized, decadent, passive culture. When the monasteries of St. Benedict took the place of decadent Rome, the Europa image disappeared from the continent to which Europa had lent her name. She reappeared, not surprisingly, when ancient culture was "reborn" during the Italian Renaissance. As if to make up for lost time, artists like Duerer, Giorgione, Tintoretto, Titian, Veronese, Goltzius, Rubens and Rembrandt found new inspiration in the titillating sexuality of the old myth. But the sexual element of the painting, while undeniable, was not the only meaning which 16th century painters ascribed to the icon. The age of discovery following the Renaissance gave a new lease of life to the image. Titian dedicated his painting of Europa to Philip II of Spain, seeing him as the new Zeus who was carrying European culture to the new world. Titian saw Philip's father Charles V, as the man who "through effort and diplomacy and sometimes dependence on arms, held together the greatest empire since antiquity, stretching from Spain to Austria with possessions as diverse as those in the New World and the Kingdom of Naples." Philip, like his Father, was the new Jove, swimming westward with Europe on his back. The identification of Philip with Jove is reinforced by an emblem created in his honor by the marquis of Pescara [which] displays Philips dominion over all the lands and seas of the globe with the explanatory banner, "Cum Jove," drawn from Virgil. The print dates from 1574, but evidently the idea had long preceded it. Thus, the image of Jove leaping continuing with Europa clinging to his back carried a political implication for Philip quite apart from any

sensual responses it provided.^[6]

The age of discovery led to another myth, one which supplanted the Europa myth for a time, namely, the myth of the Noble Savage. The phrase first appeared in English in 1672 in John Dryden's play, *The Conquest of Granada*:

I am as free as nature first made man,
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.

Dryden created the phrase, but he was drawing upon a tradition which was by then at least a century and a half old, one which harkened back to the benign, vaguely Jewish people Francis Bacon wrote about in *The New Atlantis*. The phrase unleashed a debate which would find its fullest expression during the Enlightenment of the 18th century when the *philosophes* tried to use the explorers' reports of the behavior of primitive tribes as a salutary antidote to the "savagery" which Christians exhibited during the religious wars of the 16th century. In the *Adventures of Telemachus*, Fenelon described one of those voyages:

"On our arrival upon this coast we found there a savage race who . . . lived by hunting and by the fruits which the trees spontaneously produced. These people . . . were greatly surprised and alarmed by the sight of our ships and arms and retired to the mountains. But since our soldiers were curious to see the country and hunt deer, they were met by some of these savage fugitives. The leaders of the savages accosted them thus: "We abandoned for you, the pleasant sea-coast, so that we have nothing left but these almost inaccessible mountains: at least it is just that you leave us in peace and liberty. Go, and never forget that you owe your lives to our feeling of humanity. Never forget that it was from a people whom you call rude and savage that you receive this lesson in gentleness and generosity. . . . We abhor that brutality which, under the gaudy names of ambition and glory, . . . sheds the blood of men who are all brothers. . . . We value health, frugality, liberty, and vigor of body and mind: the love of virtue, the fear of the gods, a natural goodness toward our neighbors, attachment to our friends, fidelity to all the world, moderation in prosperity, fortitude in adversity, courage always bold to speak the truth, and abhorrence of flattery If the offended gods so far blind you as to make you reject peace, you will find, when it is too late, that the people who are moderate and lovers of peace are the most formidable in war."

Fenelon wrote those words in 1699. By that time, the Jesuits had had

almost a century's experience working with the various Indian tribes on both sides of the St. Lawrence River in North America. Forced to write reports on their activities, which subsequently came to be known as the Jesuit Relations, the Jesuits compiled a voluminous account of what "the untutored mind" of the "poor Indian" was actually like and the accounts were anything but edifying. Even relatively peaceful tribes like the Abnaki eked out a precarious and laborious existence in the Gaspé peninsula as hunter-gatherers, the sort of people Cameron attempts to glamorize in *Avatar*. The Jesuits who sought to convert the Abnaki to Christianity shared their hardships as they traveled through the forests of what is now Maine hunting moose. The hunt was only possible in winter and only possible in fact when the snow was three to four feet deep. This allowed the snowshoe-clad Abnaki to swarm around the floundering moose and stab it to death with their spears, after which they set up camp on the spot and gorged themselves on huge portions of moose-meat (one account claims that some Indians ate six pounds of meat at sitting) in smoke-filled, superheated teepees. One Jesuit described lying on the floor of the teepee with his face in the dirt desperately sucking fresh air from the gap between the teepee and the ground. The smoke in the teepees was so bad that most Indians went blind from the irritation to their eyes by the time they reached the age of 40.

And that was the best-case scenario. If the snow did not reach a depth of three to four feet during a particular winter, the Indians would starve to death because they couldn't get close enough to the moose to kill it. If you add to this picture of the hardships which nature inflicted on these hunter-gatherers the cruelties which they inflicted on each other, you come with an idea of nature that makes Hobbes' verdict -- "nasty, brutish, and short" -- look benign by comparison. Father Isaac Jogues, S.J., had his fingers chewed off by savage Iroquois women after he was captured. He eventually escaped back to France, via Puritan Boston (which did not hang him as their laws required), where he had to get a dispensation from the Church to say Mass with his mutilated hands.

In light of revelations like this and Bernal Diaz's account of the Conquest of Mexico, which describes the unspeakable rites of human sacrifice practiced by the relatively "civilized" Aztecs, it's difficult to see how the Noble Savage and its concomitant religion of nature survived. But that's only because the theories behind the largely imaginary voyages which inspired the myth were more theological than anthropological. By the middle

of the 18th century, the intellectual elites in countries like France had embarked upon, not so much an impartial investigation of nature, as a concerted effort to overthrow the Catholic Church, and in particular its notion of sin, and in still more particular its notion of original sin and the effects that had on both man and nature in the wake of the Fall.

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU

If nature worship is a religion, then Jean-Jacques Rousseau is its theologian. Rousseau invented the religion of nature, based on a confusion of the two meanings of the term: 1) nature as essence and 2) nature as existence. Nature as essence implies a *telos* or finality implanted in it by its creator. Nature as existence bespeaks the consequences for a particular creature when that *telos* undergoes its actual implementation in history and matter. If nature is based on this *telos*, then reason is part of nature. If, on the other hand, there is no *telos* in nature, if nature is merely matter in motion, the belief that constitutes the first principle of materialism, then reason is the antithesis of nature because "what is natural is that which actually existed before all developments due to intelligence." The "state of nature" celebrated by thinkers of this era became a pre-rational, pre-historical realm in which man regained the "innocence" of animals by hating civilization and the Church which had formed European culture. As metaphysical sophistication declined, the first sense of the word was replaced by the second, until with the rise and eventual triumph of the English Ideology (otherwise known as the Spirit of Capitalism), as expressed "in the radically nominalist and empiricist theory of Hobbes," it alone remained. It was Rousseau's genius to conflate the two senses of the word nature into something that was congenial to both Capitalists and Treehuggers, the materialist twins in the dialectic which has dominated this discussion ever since:

"Rousseau . . . muddles up these two different senses, he locks into a single equivocal pseudo-concept the "nature" of the metaphysicians and "nature" of the empiricists. Hence, comes the Rousseauist myth of nature, which need only to be clearly expressed for its absurdity to be seen: Nature is the primitive condition of things, at which they should stop, or which they should restore, to comply with their essence. Or again: Nature is the essential need, divinely placed in things of a certain primitive condition or ante-culture which things are made to realize. . . . The conclusion will follow that the primitive state and the primitive condition of human life, the state before culture and before the institutions of reason . . . was necessarily good,

innocent, happy and that a state of goodness, a fixed condition of innocence and happiness is due to humanity."^[7]

From this materialist premise, we derive the conclusion that "man is born free," which is the premise of Rousseau's *Social Contract*. And from that fact, we can derive the futility of Christian asceticism, which claims that freedom must be attained by reason disciplining the appetites. Freedom for Rousseau's natural man means capitulating to appetite, which is precisely what Christian and Classical authors called slavery. Aquinas had captured the essence of these irreconcilable views six centuries earlier when he wrote that: ". . . since the will is of its nature ordered to what is truly good, when under the influence of a passion, a vice or a bad disposition, a man turns away from what is truly good, that man, if we consider the essential order of the will, acts as a slave, since he allows himself to be inclined against that order by some extraneous cause. But if we consider the act of the will as it is then inclined toward a seeming good, then he acts freely when he follows his passion or corrupt disposition, and he acts as a slave if, his will being still so inclined, he abstains from what he wills out of fear of the law which forbids it."^[8]

Any significant implementation of this "state of nature" means that guilt is going to be fundamental psychic fact of life for everyone who aspires to be a natural man. From the psychological point of view, this means that guilt management is going to be a major preoccupation of man in the new state of nature. It also means that the animal, as co-denizen of this new Eden, will play a major role in absolving the new man of his guilt. Troubled by guilt, man in the state of nature constantly strives to become one with the animals who enviable innocence is part of their nature.

We find in Rousseau an attempt to preserve the attractions of Christianity without the burden imposed by the cross. This is nowhere truer than in Rousseau's understanding of what came to be called "the state of nature," which is nothing more than the story of Eden, ripped out of its theological context and projected back into primitive cultures, which took on an aura of innocence and holiness insofar as their inhabitants imitated the lives of the animals they killed. Rousseau, according to Jacques Maritain, "confuses voluptuously the life according to bestiality and the life according to the intelligence."

The animal plays a crucial role in this transformation. The animal, as Dawn Brancheau found out, may kill you, but he is always innocent. Souls

burdened by guilt, especially sexual guilt, find this innocence in animals attractive. Before long the desire finds expression in a kind of psychic equation: if I were an animal, I would feel no guilt. Therefore, if I live like an animal, if I live at one with the animals, if the animals accept me as one of their own, as happens when they let me ride them, perhaps my feelings of guilt (or betrayal) will diminish.

This feeling corresponds to a certain truth. If men were sharks, there would be no such thing as sexual morality and, therefore, no such thing as guilt from sexual sin because the shark can fend for itself from the moment it is born. Children born to human beings, however, are totally helpless and require a good amount of care, which can be burdensome. Rousseau fathered five children, and we know he found them burdensome because he condemned them to an early death by abandoning them to a foundling home. Given his frame of mind it is unsurprising that he found the "innocence" of animals attractive. Or as Maritain puts it:

"Consequently the essential inclinations of human nature, and indeed the primordial conditions of moral health, require this blessed state of solitude which he pictures, projecting his own phantoms, as the perpetual flight through the woods of animals, dreamy, endowed with compassion, mating by chance meetings, and then going on with their innocent wandering. Such is the divine life in his eyes."^[9]

Sexual guilt, festering in the soul of the Christian who refuses to repent, invariably finds solace in the innocence of animals. The anti-Christian burdened by the guilt which a life devoted to appetite entails is drawn ever closer to the animals which possess the innocence he craves. He feels drawn to animals; he feels compelled in a sense to seek their approval. And how do they confer that approval? By letting the bearer of that troubled soul ride them. As the image of Europa on the Bull makes clear, riding an animal is a vaguely sexual act which bespeaks approval, but also union, a fusion of two beings, which confers on the troubled rider the innocence of the animal being ridden. Finding only momentary relief from his guilt, the Christian burdened with an uneasy conscience forces himself more and more intrusively on the animals whose innocence and approval he craves, until finally one of those unpredictable mechanisms goes off in the animal's mind and the animal kills the human who sought his approval.

This is, in a nutshell, the story of Timothy Treadwell, a man 13 years older than Dawn Brancheau, who sought out absolution from bears instead of

killer whales. From 1990 until 2003, Treadwell spent every summer in Alaska living among the grizzly bears of Katmai National Forest and Preserve. During his last five summers in Alaska, Treadwell had accumulated over 100 hours of video footage of his life with the bears. It was out of this footage that the German director Werner Herzog made his award-winning 2005 documentary *Grizzly Man*. With each passing year, Treadwell got closer and closer to the bears, ignoring the warnings of the federal wildlife reserve rangers and their regulations, until finally, as Sam Egli, the helicopter pilot who ferried Treadwell's remains out of the wilderness put it, one of the bears either "decided that he had either had enough of Tim Treadwell or that something clicked in that bear's head that he thought 'Hey, you know, he might be good to eat.'" Treadwell, according to Egli, had made an ontological category mistake that proved fatal: "Treadwell thought these bears were big, scary looking, harmless creatures that he could go up and pet and sing to and they would bond as children of the universe or some odd [thing, *sic*]. I think he had lost sight of what was really going on."

Egli then describes the consequences of bad ontology, i.e, what he found when he arrived at Treadwell's campsite: "The bear was all cut open. It was full of people. It was full of clothing. We hauled away four garbage bags of people out of that bear. Treadwell was meaning well, trying to do things to help the resource of the bears. But to me he was acting like he was working with people wearing bear costumes out there instead of wild animals. Those bears are big and ferocious, and they come equipped to kill you and eat you. And that's just what Treadwell was asking for. He got what he was asking for. He got what he deserved in my opinion. The tragedy of it was taking the girl with him. The only reason he lasted in the game as long as he did was that the bears probably thought there was something wrong with him, like he was mentally retarded or something."

Others who knew him said that Treadwell was searching for a religious experience. Ecologist Marnie Gaede claimed, "He wanted to become like the bear. Perhaps it was religious, but not in the true sense of religion. I think perhaps he wanted to mutate into a wild animal, as he says in this last letter, 'I have to mutually mutate into a wild animal to handle the life I live out here.' And I think there's a religious sense in that, in the sense of connecting so deeply that you're no longer human. And that is a religious experience."

Treadwell was driven to his "religious experience" by a life of appetite that had spiraled out of control. Born and raised on Long Island with four

other siblings, Treadwell ran into problems when he left home to attend Bradley University on a diving scholarship. According to Carol Dexter, his mother, Treadwell—who changed his name "to be theatrical," as his father put it—started drinking after arriving at Bradley and "hanging around with the wrong people." He also started doing drugs. Before long, he injured his back and ended up losing his scholarship and then coming back home, where his drug and drinking habits continued to gain the upper hand against his will. Convinced that he needed a fresh start in life, Treadwell left for California when he was 19 or 20 years old to attempt a career as an actor in movies and TV. His All-American good looks landed him a few minor roles, but the big break never came. His father recounted how Treadwell "got an agent," and how "there were promises made that never came true. He tested with the actors to get the bartender's job on *Cheers*. And allegedly he came in second to Woody Harrelson. But that is what really destroyed him. He did not get that job on *Cheers*. He spiraled down."

Eventually Treadwell's drug and alcohol abuse led to a near fatal overdose, which in turn led to an epiphany, which he describes in *Grizzly Man*. The camera, as Herzog points out, became a kind of confessional for Treadwell, and in this particular instance, the priest in the confessional was a Fox named Iris.

"I was troubled," he explains to a Iris while scratching her back and looking into the camera, "I was troubled. I drank a lot. I used to drink to the point of that I guess I was either gonna die from it or break free of it. But nothing could get me to stop drinking. I went to programs. I tried quitting myself. I did everything that I could to try not to drink, and then I did everything I could to drink, and it was killing me until I discovered this land of bears and realized that they were in such great danger that they needed a caretaker, they needed someone to look after them. But not a drunk person, not a person messed up. So I promised the bears that if I would look over them, would they please help me be a better person, and they've become so inspirational that I gave up the drinking. It was a miracle, an absolute miracle. And the miracle was animals. I live here. It's very dangerous. I run wild with the bears. I run so wild, so free, so like a child with these animals."

Treadwell goes into his sexual problems as well. These, as his testimony on camera shows, proved more difficult to resolve:

"I always cannot understand why girls don't want to be with me for a long time because I have really a nice personality. I'm fun. I'm very, very good in

the . . . You're not supposed to say that when you're a guy. But I know I am. They know I am. I don't fight with them. I'm so passive. Is that a turnoff to girls to be a patsy? It's not that I'm a total great guy. I'm a lot of fun and have a good life going. I don't know what's going on. I always wished I was gay. Would've been a lot easier. You know. You can just "bing-bing-bing." Gay guys have no problem. I mean they just go to restrooms and truck stops and they perform sex. It's like so easy for them and stuff. But you know what, alas, Timothy Treadwell is not gay. Bummer. I love girls, and girls need a lot more, you know, finesse and care, and I like that a bit. But when it goes bad, and you're alone you can't rebound like you can if you were gay. I'm sure gay people have problems too but not as much as one goofy straight guy named Timothy Treadwell. Anyway, that's my story. That's my story."

Treadwell seems to have conquered his alcohol and drug addictions, but he never mastered his sex addiction. He never brought drugs and alcohol with him to his camp in the wilderness, but he was in the habit of bringing female companions, "women," Herzog informs us, "who will here remain anonymous." Given the frankness with which so many of Treadwell's former lovers talk on camera, Herzog's reticence seems odd, unless of course Treadwell was paying the women for their visits with him. These women, including Amie Huguenard, the woman who was eaten by the same bear, rarely appear in Treadwell's film, and if they do it is only by accident. The main reason for this, of course, is Treadwell's megalomania. Treadwell needs to be the center of the show, but more than that he needs to be the center of the universe as well, the man alone in nature, because that is the mythic archetype he inherited from Rousseau and Emerson when he adopted their religion of nature. After disembarking from the pontoon plane that has just dropped him off near what will be his campsite for the next few months, Treadwell announces melodramatically to his ever-present video recorder that "I'm here alone and when you're here alone, you do get lonely." Then suddenly a woman appears in the frame and begins hauling Treadwell's gear to the beach, at which point he emerges from his lofty eco-saint *persona* and tells her, "Oh, no, I'm gonna do all this stuff because I'm supposed to be alone." Herzog stops just short of calling Treadwell a misogynist hypocrite, but he does say that "Part of the mythical character Treadwell was transforming himself into required him to be seen as completely alone."

This is the solipsistic *persona* that Treadwell inherited from the philosophies of Rousseau and Emerson. Treadwell was the American Adam

in the Alaskan Eden; he was a European who had become Rousseau's noble savage, and as such he "require[d] this blessed state of solitude which he pictures, projecting his own phantoms, as the perpetual flight through the woods of animals, dreamy, endowed with compassion, mating by chance meetings, and then going on with their innocent wandering. Such is the divine life in his eyes."

EMERSON, THE PANTHEIST

It was equally clear to Emerson, the Pantheist, that "Behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present; that spirit is one and not compound; that spirit does not act upon us from without, that is, in space and time, but spiritually, or through ourselves. Therefore, that spirit, that is, the Supreme Being, does not build up nature around us, but puts it forth through us, as the life of the tree puts forth new branches and leaves through the pores of the old."

Unlike Aristotle, who believed that man was a being who by his nature lived in cities with other men, Emerson felt that living in cities, which is to say with other human beings, causes a fatal degeneration. In order to be true to his nature, Emerson felt that man had to live alone in Nature, and Henry David Thoreau, Emerson's protégé set out to test his theory by building his cabin on the banks of Walden Pond. We can recognize this degeneration by the way animals react to our presence, or as Emerson puts it in his essay *Nature*:

"As we degenerate, the contrast between us and our house [i.e., nature] is more evident. We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God. We do not understand the notes of birds. The fox and the deer run away from us; the bear and the tiger rend us."

The converse of Emerson's claim is clear: if the bear does not rend us, it is a sign of our holiness and our oneness with the spirit of Nature. For those who grew up in the decayed Calvinism of America, not getting eaten by the bear was a sign of election. William Faulkner took the idea from Emerson and created his novella "The Bear" out of it. In this tale, the hunter plunges into the wilderness, divesting himself of gun and compass and all of the other accoutrements of civilization to confront the bear alone, as some primitive ancestor—"Oleh, chief, grandfather"—and, in not being eaten by the bear, Ike McCaslin is assured of his own election. In both instances, the encounter with the bear that did not eat you bespoke Calvinism without original sin. But it only worked if the man was all alone, because as Emerson put it, "you

cannot freely admire a noble landscape, if laborers are digging in the field hard by. The poet finds something ridiculous in his delight, until he is out of the sight of men."

Unlike Ike McCaslin, who wanted to be accepted by the bear, Timothy Treadwell, according to the testimony of everyone who knew him, wanted to become a bear. Larry Van Daele, a bear biologist from Kodiak Island, said just that: Treadwell "tended to want to become a bear. Some people would encounter him in the field and he would act like a bear, he would woof at them. Why he did this is only known to him. No one really knows for sure. . . . There's a siren song. There's a calling that makes you want to come in and spend more time in the world, because it is a simpler world. . . but in fact it's a harsh world. It's a different world that bears live in than we do. So there is that desire to get into their world, but the reality is we never can because we're very different than they are."

The local Indians found Treadwell repugnant because of that fact. Sven Hakanson, Ph.d., curator of the Aluetiq museum, claimed that Treadwell "died because he tried to be a bear. He tried to act like a bear and for us on the island, you don't do that. You don't invade their territory. It was the ultimate of disrespecting the bear and what the bear represents. I think he did more damage to the bears than he did [good] because when you habituate bears to humans, they think that all humans are safe. Where I grew up the bears avoid us, and we avoid them. They're not habituated to us. If I look at it from my culture, Timothy Treadwell crossed a boundary that we have lived with for 7,000 years. It's an unspoken boundary, and unknown boundary. But when we know we've crossed it we pay the price."

Treadwell was determined to pay the ultimate price for the privilege of becoming a bear, because becoming one was proof of his election and salvation. Or as he puts it: "If there is a God—I have no Idea if there's a God—but if there's a God, God would be very, very pleased with me. If you could just watch me here, how much I just loved them, how much I adore them, how respectful I am to them. How I am one of them. . . . It's good work. I feel good about it. I feel good about myself doing it."

At another point in *Grizzly Man*, Treadwell likens himself to Christ, who like the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, when he says, three times in a row, "I will die for these animals," then adding, "God would be pleased with me . . . [because] I am one of them. I feel good about myself, doing what I'm doing. I will care for these animals, who are giving me a life."

I had no life. Now I have a life."

Treadwell's religion turns blasphemous when in late September 2000 he sees a drought preventing the salmon run, causing the starving bears to devour their young. "We need more rain," he shouts looking up, shouting, "Melissa is eating her babies. I'm like a fucking nut. We've got to have some rain. Now, I'm not a religious guy. No. But I'm just pissed because it just doesn't seem right. So if there's a God, Downey needs to eat. Think rain. I want rain. I want if there's a God, to kick some ass down here. Let's have some water, Jesus boy. Let's have some water. Let's have some water Christ man or Allah or Hindu floaty thing. [Screaming] Let's have some fucking water for these animals."

The fact that it started raining after Treadwell threw this tantrum is proof in his eyes that, as he puts it, "I am the Lord's humble servant. There has been a miracle here. There has been an absolute miracle. It has rained 1.65 inches of rain today. It went from a trickle to a flood and it's amazing. And what is even more miraculous according to my radio it is not raining much around anywhere else but around here."

And why shouldn't the god of nature listen to Timothy Treadwell? The bears hadn't eaten him, had they? That fact alone proved that he was one of the elect, and it was pretty clear that Treadwell agreed with the bears' (albeit negative) verdict.

Herzog doesn't say so explicitly, but he implies that Treadwell was thinking of having sex with a female bear which he had named Wendy. The admission comes after two male bears have fought over who gets to mate with another female bear named Saturn, who reminds Treadwell of Michelle Pfeiffer. After the fight, Treadwell tries to console the loser in this fight, a bear he has named Mickey, by telling him, "Mickey, I've been down that street. You don't always get the chick you want. I'm not duking it out for any girl like that I'm telling you right now, but I've had my troubles with the girls. Things are bad for me with the human women, but no so bad that I have to be hitting on bears yet."

The implications of the word "yet," become clear when Treadwell waxes rhapsodic over a pile of bear shit:

"There's your poop. It just came out of her butt. I can feel it. I can feel the poop. It's warm it just came from her butt. This was just inside of her. My girl. I'm touching it. It's her poop. It's Wendy's poop. I know it may seem weird that I touched her poop, but it was inside of her. It's her life. It's her and

she's precious to me. Everything about them is perfect."

In spite of all of the general sexual weirdness, Treadwell has stumbled upon an essential truth. Animals are perfect. They are perfect because they lack free will. Unlike people like Timothy Treadwell, animals can't ruin their own lives. The *telos* which God has implanted in them is destined inexorably for its fulfillment by mechanism and instinct. The bear's perfection can only be obstructed by some material impediment, like famine or disease. *Homo Sapiens* is in the exact opposite position. Man is destined to a higher, supernatural, eternal end, one in which material impediment is ultimately irrelevant, because his end as a rational creature can only be found in the eternal sphere where materiality plays no role, but, because of that fact, man can only achieve his end through the use of his own intellect and will. He has to know the good and will to achieve it and then work out that destiny by using his reason to collaborate with God's grace. Man can screw up his life in a way that is impossible for animals, who are formally ordained to perfection by the instincts which God implants in them. That lower order of perfection is precisely the salvation that Treadwell sought by seeking to become a bear, but in seeking that end he was so blinded by his disordered passions that he failed to see that that goal was unobtainable. As the bear biologist put it, "It's a different world that bears live in than we do. So there is that desire to get into their world, but the reality is we never can because we're very different than they are."

Treadwell was a truly Emersonian figure, if for no other reason than because there was "something ridiculous in his delight." Herzog views Treadwell as both eco-saint and lunatic. He is, in other words, a typical American—at least from the German point of view. And in a sense Herzog is right. Timothy Treadwell and Dawn Brancheau are only the *reductio ad absurdum* of an idea which got introduced into American thought by people like Ralph Waldo Emerson. The same America which helped engender the myth of the Noble Savage became the home of Europeans determined to live out that myth. Because of its remoteness from the centers of European culture, the transformations which took place among the elites in France during the 18th century took place a century later in America. During the period from 1741, when Jonathan Edwards gave his sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" during the First Great Awakening, until 1836, when Ralph Waldo Emerson published his essay "Nature," the Calvinist exaggeration of original sin as total depravity died in America and replaced

by a Pelagian concept of man which proposed nothing less than that in America the American Adam was living in a new Garden of Eden. Emerson's protégé, Henry David Thoreau, went off to live in the "wilds" outside Concord for much the same reason that Timothy Treadwell moved to Alaska, both were in search of a "religious experience" that would confirm their election as Rousseauvian eco-saints and which could only be found in "nature." In his book *The American Adam*, R. W. B. Lewis recounts how Thoreau wrote that, as part of his daily regimen at Walden, "I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things I ever did." Commenting on Thoreau's diary entry, Lewis tells us that "The language tells us everything, as Thoreau meant it to. He had his own sacramental system, his own rite of baptism. But his use of the word "nature" indicates that the function of sacraments was to expose the individual again to the currents flowing through nature, rather than to the grace flowing down from supernature. The ritual of purification was no less for Thoreau than for St. Paul a dying into life; but Thoreau marched to the music he heard; it was the music of the age; and he marched in a direction opposite to St. Paul."

Neither Nathaniel Hawthorne nor Herman Melville accepted Emerson's religion of nature. But neither Hawthorne, who almost became a Catholic, nor Melville, who spent the end of his life slipping back and forth over the line separating depression and mental illness, could propose the *telos* in nature which would provide the antidote to Emerson's pantheism. Nature is fallen in Melville's famous novel *Moby Dick*, but it remains as subjective for Captain Ahab as it was for Ralph Waldo Emerson's man in nature, where it "always wears the colors of the spirit." The whale is a function of Ahab's will:

"Ahab had cherished a wild vindictiveness against the whale, all the more fell for that in his frantic morbidness he at last came to identify with him, not only all his bodily woes, but all his intellectual and spiritual exasperations. The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil. Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments;

all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in *Moby Dick*. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it."

Ahab in this regard is not unlike Werner Herzog. Unlike Timothy Treadwell, Werner Herzog believes that "the common denominator of the universe is not harmony but chaos, hostility and murder." In this, Herzog is the modern Ahab, who in spite of himself still remains Treadwell's twin, because what both men lack is the ability to look at nature and see anything other than the troubled state of their own souls. Herzog, like Ahab, looks at the doubloon nailed to the mast and declares "All is Herzog."

There is whale riding in *Moby Dick*, but in a Calvinist universe, whale riding takes on a definitely funereal cast. In this regard, the last day of the whale hunt in *Moby Dick* bears an uncanny resemblance to Dawn Brancheau's last ride at SeaWorld. In the third and final day of Ahab's quest to kill the whale, one of the three whaling boats gets staved by the whale's tail, dumping the Parsee harpooner overboard. It looks as if the Parsee goes down to watery grave, but he then re-emerges in a Calvinist parody of the Resurrection: "Lashed round and round to the fish's back; pinioned in the turns upon turns in which, during the past night, the whale had reeled the involutions of the lines around him, the half torn body of the Parsee was seen; his sable raiment frayed to shreds; his distended eyes turned full upon old Ahab."

This is whale-riding in a world where the Calvinist version of original sin as total depravity is still regnant. *Moby Dick* is in many ways the Calvinist version of *Free Willy*, something which becomes apparent when the white whale bears down on the Pequod:

"all their enchanted eyes [were] intent upon the whale, which from side to side strangely vibrating his predestinating head, sent a broad band of overspreading semicircular foam before him as he rushed. Retribution, swift vengeance, eternal malice were in his whole aspect, and spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled. Some fell flat upon their faces. Like dislodged trucks, the heads of the harpooneers aloft shook on their bull-like necks. Through the breach, they heard the waters pour, as mountain

torrents down a flume."

Emerson got his Idealism from the Germans via Carlyle, but in Germany Romanticism was never individualistic. In America the Noble Savage was asexual, something which may account for Timothy Treadwell keeping his girlfriends out of his videos. Emerson was, if anything, a prude who was shocked and dismayed when Whitman dedicated the homoerotic musings of *Leaves of Grass* to him. As in theology, so in morals, especially sexual morals—America was always a century behind Europe. In Germany the image of Europa went into eclipse during the Romantic era, which worshipped at the altars of the Middle Ages and Germanic racial consciousness, but it returned with a vengeance in the modern era, especially after World War I, due largely to Friedrich Nietzsche's re-evaluation of Greek thought. "O Europa! Europa!", Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886):

"We know the horned beast that always most attracted you, that ever anew threatens and endangers you! Your ancient tale could once again become a 'story' [i.e., *Geschichte*, pun on two meaning of term, "story" and "history"]—once again a huge foolishness could master you and carry you away! And underneath no god is concealed, no! only an 'Idea, a modern Idea!'"^[10]

The modern idea which carried 20th century Europa away on its back was sexual liberation. Since Nietzsche's advocacy of sexual liberation was based a particular reading of Greek texts, it is not surprising that the image of Europa would experience a comeback under his influence:

"In the early 20th century, interests shifted. Turn-of-the-century *Jugendstil* artists, in their exploration of animal desire in human beings and specifically the sexuality of females, as recently exposed and analyzed by Freud, Weininger and others, were fascinated by the topos of Beauty and the Beast, as reflected in the many paintings and poems featuring Leda and the Swan, Ganymede and the eagle, as well as myths involving such man-beasts as centaurs and sirens and Circe's transformation of Odysseus's crew into swine. The juxtaposition of nude girls with large hairy beasts, including bears, camels, pigs and elephants, as represented par excellence by Europa with her bull, lent admirably to this obsession."^[11]

The German version of *King Kong* was known as *King Kong und die Weisse Frau*, and the posters advertising this film went out of their way to emphasize the "juxtaposition of nude girls with large hairy beasts" which Ziolkowski saw as iconic for an era of decadence that was contemporaneous

with the years of the Weimar Republik. Deprived of the imagery of bringing Europa to the new world which so energized the paintings of the baroque era, modern artists saw Europa as an image of a sexually corrupted culture that seemed headed toward its doom. Europa became as well a symbol of the corruption of the sexual morals of women, and as a result the imagery in the depiction as well as the re-telling of the tale became sexualized if not pornographic. The change in mood becomes apparent in Lovis Corinth's pornographic lithographs, as well as in poems like Karl Leopold Mayer's "Der Raub der Europa" (1913) in which Europa kneels before the bull and sends her companions to gather grass and foliage to feed it. With a feeling that the bull understands her innermost being, Europa now "ignites the light of my soul to you with trembling hands." In fact, her soul, "distracted by its dreams, dances a dance of veils before you, casts off the veils, and exposes itself to you."

"Unafraid Europa mounts the bull, telling her companions that she never felt more at peace and secure than now. As the bull moves toward the shore . . . Europa enters a state of virtually orgasmic ecstasy, urging her mount to go faster, to sprout wings, and fly as the maidens look on with astonishment and dismay. Europa disappears with the words: 'Abyss I laugh at you! World, you vestment, glide from my body! Glory of the sky, wretched torches, pale before the light within me!' The girls collapse on the beach, one lamenting that Europa has been abducted by a beast and another jubilant that she has been taken by a god."[\[12\]](#)

That a god should be portrayed as an animal, more often than not a bull, is a commonplace of ancient cultures, whether Minoan, Semitic or Roman. Cultures that have become listless and decadent worship virility (or fertility) as a form of sympathetic magic, hoping to incorporate into their neurasthenic, desiccated lives manifestations of health without wanting to undergo the asceticism that gives access to its source. The bull jumpers in capitalist Crete, the Mithra worshippers at the time of Julian the Apostate, the Platonic Academy founded by the Medicis in Florence and the decadent artists of Weimar Germany all venerated the image of Europa, as if consoled by the message its imagery conveyed. Their effeminate culture was being born away on the back of some more virile power, but at least they could enjoy the ride, for a while anyway. At some point on her sea voyage, Europe realized that she could no longer climb down. At this point she began to cling to the animal that had abducted her even more tenaciously. In the realm of

mythology, this clinging led to a mating which produced a monster, the Minotaur. In Europe, the promiscuous intercourse of the '20s begat the monsters of the '30s and '40s every bit as inexorably as in SeaWorld and Alaska, the same sort of clinging set off the mechanisms that resulted in the death of the rider. By 1910, it was clear that Europa's abduction was a sign of bad things in store.

As part of the Greek-inspired interest in the Dionysian then pulsating through European culture, Ziolkowski mentions "Isadora Duncan [who] fascinated the public with her re-creation of ancient Greek dances."^[13] The Noble Savage, not surprisingly found his apotheosis in America, when the idea of American innocence fused with the Idea of Nietzschean Dionysian excess in the person of Isadora Duncan, American priestess of Dionysian rites. During the first two decades of the 20th century, there was no more prominent advocate of Dionysian excess and corruption of the sexual morals of women which Euripedes has warned against in *The Bacchae* than Isadora Duncan.

What Duncan learned from Ralph Waldo Emerson's ransacking of the German Idealist tradition is that nature and mind are one and the same thing. Nature is not the expression of essence as it manifests itself in time and place; nature is an expression of the mind of one person. This philosophy is, of course, totally antithetical to the social nature of man, articulated by Aristotle when he wrote "*Anthropos phusei politikon zoon*." It also lends itself to one-man shows of the sort that Duncan put on when she danced and that Emerson put on when he philosophized. "Nature," as Emerson put it in his essay of the same name, "always wears the colors of the spirit." When it comes to ballet, folk dance is the equivalent of nature. But Duncan abhorred ethnic dance every bit as much as she hated ballet. By the fact that she was an American, which is to say someone who could go off and wander through nearby forests at will, Duncan was a more reliable conduit of the true spirit of Nature than, say, Russian peasants dancing their ethnic dances, because, as Emerson put it, "In the woods we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life, -- no disgrace, no calamity, . . . which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground -- my head bathed in blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all. The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me. I am part or particle of God."

Isadora Duncan was Emerson's "transparent eye-ball" in the realm of

dance. As an American, she was especially suited to be the oracle of dance, nature's Terpsichore, because as an American she had succeeded in growing up in nature, which is to say, without going to school, and, therefore, without the imposition of all of the forms of civilization which rendered movement unnatural and artificial.

During her early days as struggling artist in Chicago and New York, when Duncan was confronted by skeptical impresarios like Augustine Daly, who wanted to know where she learned how to dance, which is to say, where she had studied, Duncan would respond with an explanation that could have been taken verbatim from Emerson's *Nature*:

"Where have I discovered it [modern dance]? By the Pacific Ocean, by the waving pine forests of Sierra Nevada. I have seen the ideal figures of America dancing over the top of the Rockies. The supreme poet of our country is Walt Whitman. I have discovered the dance that is worthy of the poem of Walt Whitman. For the children of America I will create a new dance that will express America. I will bring to your theater the vital soul that it lacks, the soul of the dancer."

By citing Whitman as her teacher, Duncan was citing Emerson indirectly. When Emerson says, "Every natural action is graceful" and that Art is "nature passed through the alembic of man," he established the artistic parameters that Duncan embodied in her art. When Duncan stood in front of the Moujik children and made her skyward gesture and told them to think of Apollo, she was only acting out what Emerson indicated when he wrote that in art, "nature work[s] through the will of man filled with the beauty of her first works." This was so because: "Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as its picture."

If the world had a stable existence, folk dance could have had a legitimate place in the natural scheme of things, but for Emerson, the idealist, and therefore for Duncan, "Nature" is another word for the mind of the artist, so much so, in fact that "the world becomes, at last, only a realized will—the double of man." The last sentence anticipates Nietzsche, an admirer of Emerson, for obvious reasons, but primarily because both Emerson and Nietzsche were aware that the transition in German Philosophy from idealists like Fichte to voluntarists like Schopenhauer was only possible through the exaltation and apotheosis of the will which Nietzsche brought to completion. Emerson proposes the Swiss mathematician Euler as his model because, as he

puts it, "Euler . . . had already transferred nature into the mind, and left matter like an outcast corpse" when he wrote "This will be found contrary to all experience, yet is true."

By the time Emerson got around to writing "Self-Reliance" a few years after writing *Nature*, "Nature" had become little more than a figment of the artist's mind and a manifestation of his will. Give this aesthetics, art and revolution became not only compatible, the latter became indispensable to the former; art, as Isadora was now demonstrating in the Soviet Union, was ultimately the imposition of the will of the artist on an essentially unconscious populace waiting to be liberated from the chains of tradition. Art was inextricably bound up with will because as Emerson had said in "Self-Reliance": "To believe in your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men—that is genius." Revolution was simply the imposition of will on a large scale. The moral law, religion, "the tradition sacredness of traditions" —all of these relics of the past were to be swept away by American liberators, the true revolutionaries, who recognized that history is bunk and that "The centuries are conspirators against the sanity and authority of the soul. Time and space are but physiological colors which the eye makes."

History is no longer the realm in which essence takes on the qualities of existence. History's artifacts, what we would in general call culture, as manifested in say ethnic dance, are no longer to be treated with reverence. They are to be swept away and replaced with the confections of minds like Duncan and Emerson, because as the latter said, "History is an impertinence and an injury if it be anything more than a cheerful apologue or parable of my being and becoming." Culture, in other words, was all about me.

As a result of Duncan's reading of Emerson (via Whitman), modern dance became an early manifestation of American imperialism. American dance, like the philosophy which inspired it, is radically solipsistic. It insists that "Nothing is at last sacred but the integrity of your own mind." When one of Emerson's contemporaries responded by saying that the impulses in a man's mind were not necessarily his own, and that in fact they might come from the Devil, Emerson, like Ahab, consecrated himself to the devil by responding:

"They do no seem to me to be such, but if I am the Devil's child, I will live then from the Devil. No law can be sacred to me but that of my nature. . . . The only right is what is after my constitution, the only wrong is what is

against it. A man is to carry himself in the presence of all opposition as if everything were titular and ephemeral but he."

SOLIPSISM

This solipsism was subversive of the moral law, as the above passage indicates. It was also subversive of culture, both of the high and folk varieties, as Duncan's attack on both ballet and Russian folk dancing indicated. It bespoke as well the American contempt for history. When Henry Ford said, "History is bunk," he was only giving laconic expression to Emerson's philosophy: "Wherever a mind is simple and receives a divine wisdom, old things pass away, -- means teachers, texts, temples fall; it lives now and absorbs past and present into the present hour."

Duncan's revolutionary art flowed naturally from Emerson's principles. As part of her 1915 American tour, Duncan performed her interpretation of the Marseillaise at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York. McDonagh considered this number "one of Duncan's most successful dances" because it was "born of her natural sympathy for those attempting to overthrow the established order."

What follows is a description that is consistent with other descriptions of Duncan's "genius." Duncan had a knack for pantomime. She had an intuitive ability to invent motions that corresponded to the music she heard, but beyond that she had the ability to combine those motions into allegories of the human spirit. During the playing of the Marseillaise, Duncan stood "enfolded in a crimson robe that extends to the ground. Then she reacts as if observing an advancing enemy. The assault almost crushes her, her throat is seized, but she kisses her flag for sustenance, she has tasted blood but she rises weeping her arm over her head. Her mouth is opened in a silent cry and the great cloak hangs from her clenched fists like an awful banner. Her anguished outburst is also a summons to arms to her comrades. She makes no sound, but the effect of her attitude seems to make the words echo through everyone's ears. . . . Her body has a heroic grandeur, her gestures are imperious, she will triumph. And then the strife is followed by a majestic calm and she has the epic look of great statuary. . . . The final pose reminded one viewer of the Winged Victory of Samothrace and inspired several artists to do sketches of her."

There is a certain irony here. Just as Emerson's philosophy was radically solipsistic, so Duncan's school of dance was something that only she could do. Emerson's philosophy made sense if there were only one person in

the world, and his name was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Duncan's dance was equally American and equally solipsistic in its way. She may have been on a stage in front of hundreds of people, but in her mind Duncan was alone in Nature, with an imaginary video camera recording the movements of her increasingly plump body, which in turn mirrored her increasingly bloated ego.

In this she was not unlike Timothy Treadwell, who used nature as the prop and background before which he bared his soul to an actual video camera. By the end of *Grizzly Man*, Herzog portrays Treadwell as a revolutionary in the mold of Henry David Thoreau. Treadwell, Herzog tells us, "is fighting civilization itself. It is the same civilization that cast Thoreau out of Walden."

First of all, no one cast Thoreau out of Walden. He left of his own accord. In fact, he never lived there exclusively. Concord was only a moderate walk away, and Thoreau walked to town whenever the spirit moved him.

This option was not available to Timothy Treadwell, who had to wait for his bush pilot friend Willy Fulton to take him back to civilization. Burdened by his troubled conscience and deprived of the *Ecclesia* which could absolve him of his guilt, Treadwell became both a revolutionary and a madman at one and the same time. Treadwell began one of his video camera soliloquies by announcing, "I have decided to violate a federal rule, which states that every week I must move one mile after staying for seven consecutive days." Treadwell came to this conclusion because if he were to move, he could not protect the bears, the sole purpose of his self-appointed ministry. "Therefore, I have decided to protest the United States government and guard these bears anyway." Treadwell never mentions Thoreau, but it is clear (to Herzog at least) that he is drawing on his other famous work *Civil Disobedience*.

By this point in his development (or decline into mental illness), Treadwell finds any rule whatsoever intolerable, even, as Herzog puts it, the "very reasonable park rule that you have to maintain at least 100 yards distance from the bears," a rule that would have saved his life had he followed it. The rule is intolerable and tyrannical because in Treadwell's megalomaniacal view of himself, "I'm the only protection for these animals out here. The government flying over a total of two times in two months" can't protect the bears. And if they are not willing to do what is necessary,

"How dare they challenge me? How dare they smear me with their campaigns."

So Treadwell decides to become a revolutionary, because that is the logical outcome of the thought which he has inherited from Emerson and Thoreau. "I will fight them. I will be an American dissident if I need be. There's a patriotic time going on right now, but as far as this fucking government's concerned, fuck you motherfucking Park Service!"

Throughout the movie, Treadwell's use of the word "fuck" is the infallible sign of the onset of madness. Once Treadwell begins talking about the Park Service, rage overpowers him, and when that happens he begins to lose contact with reality. In this particular instance, the word "fuck" sets off a tirade against the Park Service in general, from which Treadwell descends into a detailed name-by-name attack on the Park Service personnel he has worked with for the past 13 years, referring to them as "Fucking losers. Fucking nobodies." Unlike Timothy Treadwell, none of the park service employees have appeared on David Letterman. As a result, Treadwell, the celebrity, can say, "I beat your fucking asses. I protected the animals. I did it. Fuck you." Herzog describes Treadwell's rage as "almost incandescent, artistic," but before long it becomes totally incoherent as well. After claiming once again that "I beat you. I'm the champion. I'm the fucking champion. I beat your fucking asses," rage has so mastered Treadwell's mind that all he can do is repeat one obscenity after another, "Fuck. Fucking Fucks," he sputters into his video camera and then lapses into silence.

A CERTAIN ABSURDITY

Referring to Treadwell and Huguenard, Herzog claims that "there was a certain absurdity in their end." If so, the absurdity had its own logic. Treadwell's rage against civilization had reached the point of no return. As everyone had predicted, he had become a bear which was incapable of living in captivity. In late September 2003, the summer had drawn to a close, and their time with the bears had ended, and both Treadwell and Amie Huguenard had returned to Kodiak Island to fly back to California. In his attempt to board the plane, Treadwell got into an argument with a man he characterized in his diary as an obese airline agent over the validity of his ticket. Before it was the park service telling him what he could do, now it was the airline employees. Finally, unable to tolerate any impositions on his god-like independence, Treadwell exploded--"How much I hate the people's world," he wrote--and in a fit of rage returned, with Amie, to Grizzly Maze, which

was now a different place. Treadwell had never been there this late in the year before, and when he returned he found that all of his usual bear friends had gone into hibernation and been replaced by "scarier, unknown bears from the interior." One of those bears was simply known by the number 141. Treadwell like Adam gave names to the creatures who lived in his own personal Eden. It was an ominous sign, therefore, when an older bear with only a number for a name showed up after all of the bears Treadwell had named had gone down for their winter's nap.

The new denizens of Grizzly Maze were driven by a sense of desperation. They were older; they were less fit; the salmon run had already taken place, and the cream of the crop was now in the bellies of the local hibernating bears. This desperation became apparent in 141's frantic attempts to dredge rotting salmon carcasses from the lake bottom. Bear 141 knew in the inchoate way that animals know things that a certain amount of protein was necessary to survive the winter hibernation. When the salmon population proved inadequate, 141's instincts decided for him that any other source of protein would do. Sensing this, Amie grew scared and worried; the air was full of menace, and as if that weren't bad enough, she feared that she would miss the deadline for starting her new job. She talked about leaving Treadwell for good.

Hours before his death, Treadwell stood in front of his video camera for the last time announcing like some raving King Lear about to be dispossessed of his kingdom that "A hurricane force is now building." Since, as Emerson said, "Nature always wears the colors of the spirit," we must assume that his hurricane corresponded to, nay, was a manifestation of the howling rage that had been consuming Treadwell's soul.

Minutes later an equally malevolent manifestation of Treadwell's rage would fasten its jaws, appropriately enough, on his skull. According to the lacerations he found on Treadwell's skull, Kodiak Island coroner Dr. Franc Fallico concluded that Bear 141 initially attacked Treadwell by sinking his teeth into his head, where Fallico found massive lacerations that had peeled the scalp away from Treadwell's skull. Then the bear let Treadwell's head drop from his mouth and grabbed him "in the high leg area" and began eating Treadwell's entrails. At this point Amie, in spite of Treadwell telling her to run away, began banging Bear 141 over the head with a frying pan, a futile gesture which didn't save Treadwell's life and ultimately doomed her own.

When Willy Fulton arrived to pick up Treadwell and Hugenard he

found the silence that greeted his arrival full of menace. That menace became reality when a bear chased him out of the copse of alders near their camp back to his plane. When Fulton flew his plane over the camp site, he looked down and saw a human rib cage and knew that it was either Tim's or Amie's corpse lying there. Fulton then flew his plane in low over the bear to scare it off but, as he put it, "Every time I would come over he'd just start eating faster and faster and crouch over this rib cage there."

As of 2010, the year in which Dawn Brancheau died in the mouth of the Tilikum, the debate over the nature of nature is every bit as unresolved as it was in 1851 when Melville portrayed Captain Ahab as dying in the mouth of a different whale. At the moment the religion that claimed the lives of nature worshippers like Timothy Treadwell and Dawn Brancheau seems to be in the ascendant. *Avatar*, which won an Academy Award for its special effects, is the purest expression of that religion we have had in a long time, perhaps since Margaret Mead wrote *Coming of Age in Samoa*. And yet, the culmination of a genre almost invariably marks the moment at which it begins to decline. Although it came out five years earlier than *Avatar*, Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man* remains its rebuttal, especially when Herzog says, "In all the faces of all the bears that Treadwell ever filmed I discover no kinship, no understanding no mercy. I see only the overwhelming indifference of nature. To me there is no such thing as a secret world of the bears. And this blank stare speaks only of a half-bored interest in food. But for Timothy Treadwell this bear was a friend, a savior."

We have already mentioned Herzog's kinship with Captain Ahab. For both nature is by turns malevolent or indifferent. In either case, it deserves to be exploited or subdued in the crudest sense of the word, which is, of course, what happens when the American Imperium's military/industrial complex arrives on Planet Pandora. The Calvinism which Moby Dick personified is dead, but its spirit lives on, as Marx predicted, in Capitalism. In Calvinist America,

"the devout and politically free inhabitants of New England is a kind of Laocoon who makes not the least effort to escape from the serpents which are crushing him. Mammon is his Idol, which he adores not only with his lips but with the whole force of his body and mind. In his view the world is no more than a Stock Exchange, and he is convinced that he has no other destiny here below than to become richer than his neighbor. Trade has seized upon all his thoughts, and he has no other recreation than to exchange objects. When he

travels, he carries, so to speak, his goods and his counter on his back and talks only of interest and profit."

Avatar is nothing if not a violent attack on the Capitalism which succeeded Calvinism as one of America's religious alternatives. Capitalism is to Emersonian Nature worship what Republicans are to Democrats, which is to say, two wings of the same bird of prey. *Avatar* is naïve because it proposes the Emersonian nature religion as the antithesis of Capitalism instead of its dialectical complement. Dawn Brancheau's death at SeaWorld is the ultimate refutation of that false dichotomy. SeaWorld is proof that Capitalism and Rousseauvianism are as compatible as Capitalism and feminism. SeaWorld has accomplished the Hegelian synthesis of Emersonian Pelagianism and Melville's Calvinistic pessimism about both nature and human nature. SeaWorld has turned nature worship into a business. Money, not theology, is the true ecumenical *lingua franca* linking the Rousseauvians at SeaWorld and Bildad and Peleg, the New England Puritan capitalists who sent Ahab off on his quest:

"Money is the jealous god of Israel, beside which no other god may exist. Money abases all the gods of mankind and changes them into commodities. Money is the universal and self-sufficient value of all things. It has, therefore, deprived the whole world, both the human world and nature, of their own proper value. Money is the alienated essence of man's work and existence; this essence dominates him and he worships it. . . . The god of the Jews has been secularized and has become the god of this world. The bill of exchange is the real god of the Jew. His god is only an illusory bill of exchange."^[14]

As Tawney showed *malgre lui*, there is no difference on the theoretical level between the Puritan Divine and the Catholic Schoolman when it comes to the relationship between morality and economics. On the practical level, however, the exact opposite was true. If we ask what the Jew and the Puritan have in common on the practical level, the answer is Capitalism, not theology.

When the Civil War broke out in America, an epoch of American life came to an end, and when it ended the status of nature was left unresolved, which is where the *status questionis* remains today. And it remains there for a very simple reason: there is simply no way to resolve the dichotomy over nature which Calvinism has bequeathed us because both terms of the equation are based on a faulty understanding of original sin. The Fall did not bring about total depravity creating a totally alien universe indifferent to our

wishes, as Calvin, Melville, and Herzog would have it, but -- *pace*, Rousseau, Emerson, Thoreau, Cameron -- the Fall did happen, and it did leave us wounded and weak when it comes to dealing with our imperious appetites, as Timothy Treadwell learned.

Avatar glamorizes the life of Hunter-gatherer and suggests that in the state of nature sexual equality reigned, but who but a pampered Hollywood director would glamorize the life of hunter/gatherers? The only thing that makes this possible is capitalist technology and the image of Eden which the post-Christian West is incapable of expelling from its mind. Incapable of expelling the idea of Eden, the post-Christian West tries to subvert it instead by ripping it out of its theological context, which is to say, the Catholic Church and projecting it to where the Church has never been, which is to say far away planets or cultures the Yanomamo of the Amazon, where the natives have permission to kill as long as the Brazilian government can keep them from Baptism.

There is only one antidote to that Fall of the first Adam and that is the death and Resurrection of the Second Adam, Jesus Christ. Missing from all of American history is the idea that "grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it." As Maritain puts it,

"One absolute essential of Christianity is the supernatural quality of grace. Revoke that supernatural quality and Christianity goes bad. What do we find at the source of modern disorder? A naturalization of Christianity. It is clear that the Gospel, rendered purely natural (and therefore absolutely debased) becomes a revolutionary ferment of extraordinary virulence."^[15]

GRACE DOES NOT DESTROY NATURE; IT PERFECTS IT

What do "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," *Moby Dick*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Grizzly Man* and Capitalism have in common? The Idea that the Calvinist God and His grace is somehow at odds with nature and implies its destruction. What do Emerson's *Nature*, Thoreau's *Walden*, *Born Free*, *Gorillas in the Mist*, *Free Willy*, *Whale Rider* and *Avatar* have in common? The idea that nature has no need of grace. Nature is in fact perfect on its own terms. The religion of nature is Eden without the Fall. Eden is transposed back in time to some primitive region before the advent of Christianity, which in the mind of the decadent westerner means the world absolved of sexual prohibition. The *Avatar* version of Eden

"means that man originally lived in a purely natural paradise of happiness and goodness, and that Nature herself will in future undertake the office which

grace fulfilled in the Catholic conception. It also means that such a state of happiness and goodness, of exemption from servile work and suffering is natural to man, that is to say, essentially required by our nature. Not only, then, is there no original sin of which we bear the guilt at our birth and still keep the wounds, not only is there no seat of concupiscence and unhealthy proclivities to incline us to evil, but further, the state of suffering and hardship is one essentially opposed to nature and started by civilization, and our nature demands that we should at any cost be freed from it. This is what the dogma of natural Goodness amounts to. It is only a cutting down of the Christian dogma of Adamic innocence to fit the scheme of romantic naturalism."[\[16\]](#)

Pace, Jean-Jacques—man is not born free, nor does he find freedom in imitating the instincts of animals; the natural state of man is slavery, and it is only by disciplining his will by the grace of God and seeking to know the truth that he can attain the good. The animals are the slaves of their instincts, something which assures them the state of natural happiness which is their only lot in life. The men who seek to live with and like animals are ultimately nothing more than the slaves of their own passions, something which assures them a state of eternal unhappiness. The only people who make it out of those dual slaveries are the saints, "and they have taught us the secret of that state of liberty, which is supernatural. Love is that secret. . . . It is when love is consummated that liberty is won. . . . Sanctity, fulfilling the law out of love, is no longer under restraint to the law. There is only one liberty, that of the saints."[\[17\]](#)

Toward the end of *Grizzly Man*, Werner Herzog shows Kathleen Parker, a woman whom Herzog describes as having a Platonic relationship with Treadwell, as well as Jewel Palovak, with whom he had an un-Platonic relationship, scattering Treadwell's ashes, as well as bear fur, plant seeds, and whatever else came to their minds over Treadwell's last campsite. "I love you," Kathleen said, scattering his ashes. The gesture celebrates the conviction of these two women that Treadwell "finally figured a way out to live here forever. He's here forever."

Dawn Brancheau's Mass of Christian burial took place on Monday, March 1, at St. Rita of Cascia Church on the South Side of Chicago. She was buried at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Alsip. According to a report filed for CBS news by Susan Carlson, Many of the mourners took "comfort in the fact that she was able to achieve her dream of training whales."

"It's pretty evident from everybody you talk to that she died doing exactly what she loved doing," said Alderman Michael Zalewski, representing the temporal powers. "I think it's important that everyone comes out and remembers that. She was very happy in her profession."

Instead of chattering on about how Dawn "died doing what she loved" in the mouth of a whale which she considered one of her own children, the mourners would have done better to contemplate a recent press release from the Cardinal Newman Society which noted that

"Researchers from Mississippi State University considered a survey of 1,000 college students nationwide and were surprised to find that "women attending colleges and universities affiliated with the Catholic Church are almost four times as likely to have participated in 'hooking up' compared to women at secular schools."

The University of Mississippi study only confirmed another study released by Georgetown University which

"found significant declines in Catholic practice and fidelity among students at 34 Catholic colleges in the United States. While 16 percent of Catholics at these institutions increase support for the pro-life position on abortion, 31 percent become more "pro-choice" over four years. Similar results on same-sex marriage: 16 percent embrace Catholic teaching on marriage, but 39 percent move further away from it. Alarming, 12 percent of Catholic students leave the faith altogether—most of them declaring no religion at all."

Or worse than that, a religion that compels them to ride on the backs of whales.

Rev. Thomas McCarthy, who gave the homily at her funeral Mass, opined that "We must honor her by giving the light she has given us." With that, "candles flickered through the congregation of 200," representing the "light . . . she gave to her work, family, friends and faith."

At moments like this all a Catholic can do is thank God that the sacraments function *ex opere operata* and commend Dawn's soul to God.

* * *

E. Micheal Jones, Ph.D., editor of [Culture Wars Magazine](#), is the author of a dozen or more books, not all of which are available in electronic format. You may contact him at jones@culturewars.com.

Footnotes

[1] Theodore Ziolkowski, *Minos and the Moderns: Cretan Myth in 20th Century Literature and Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

[2] Ziolkowski, p. 4.

[3] Ziolkowski, p. 7.

[4] Hilliard T. Goldfarb, *DavDuncan Freedberg, Manuela B. Mena Marques, Titian and Rubens: Power, Politics and Style* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1998), p. 15.

[5] Ziolkowski, p. 6.

[6] Goldfarb, p. 17.

[7] Jacques Maritain, *Three Reformers* (New York: Scribners, 1929), p. 128-9.

[8] Maritain, p.163.

[9] Maritain, p. 121

[10] Ziolkowski, p. 30.

[11] Ziolkowski, p. 31.

[12] Ziolkowski, p. 36

[13] Ziolkowski, p. 40.

[14] Marx, p. 50.

[15] Maritain, p.142.

[16] Maritain, p. 144.

[17] Maritain,